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E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/11/2016
TAGS: [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [ASEAN](#) [MY](#)
SUBJECT: ASEAN DEFENSE MINISTERIAL MEETING HELD IN KUALA
LUMPUR

REF: A. 05 KUALA LUMPUR 3081
[1](#)B. RANGOON 445

Classified By: Political Counselor Thomas F. Daughton for
reasons 1.4 b, d.

[1](#)1. (C) The first-ever ASEAN Defense Ministerial Meeting (ADMM), held in Kuala Lumpur on May 9, represented a step toward bolstering ASEAN's long-neglected security pillar, the ASEAN Security Community (ASC). Although little of real substance appears to have been discussed, the Malaysian government nonetheless felt it necessary to clarify publicly that the meeting, attended by nine of the ten ASEAN defense ministers, was "not based on threat perception" or, by implication, aimed at any outside powers. After the meeting, Deputy Prime Minister Najib Razak (who also serves as defense minister) told the press there was a possibility that ASEAN dialogue partners would be invited to participate in future ADMMs. He also said the ADMM had not discussed military exercises or peacekeeping, but that discussion of such aspects would come in the future. Najib explained Burma's absence from the ADMM by citing "pressing domestic engagements" in Burma. He also announced that the ADMM would be held in Singapore next year.

[1](#)2. (C) The Singaporean Deputy High Commissioner characterized the ADMM as "short" -- an afternoon meeting followed by a dinner. He told us that the only real item on the agenda was the adoption of a previously drafted, anodyne communique (see below). Our Singaporean contact said that Thailand first proposed the establishment of the ADMM, which prompted a counterproposal from the Malaysians (ref A) to hold a defense ministerial for the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). Most ASEAN members thought an ARF defense ministerial was premature, he observed, and there was a consensus that the ADMM was a more appropriate step in institutionalizing the ASC. The Singaporean also noted that the Burmese were absent because Senior General Than Shwe, who holds the defense portfolio, had not designated a subordinate to represent him.

[1](#)3. (U) In their communique, the ADMM participants agreed to promote regional peace and stability through dialogue and cooperation in defense and security; to give guidance to existing senior defense and senior military officials' dialogue and cooperation in the field of defense and security within ASEAN and between ASEAN and dialogue partners; to promote mutual trust and greater understanding of defense policies, threat perceptions and security challenges, as well as the enhancement of transparency and openness; and to contribute to the establishment of an ASC as stipulated in the Bali Concord II and to promote the implementation of the Vientiane Action Program on the ASC.

[1](#)4. (C) COMMENT: The ASC is not intended to evolve into a security bloc. Nor is the ADMM meant to supercede the ARF as the main forum for regional security dialogue. Malaysia is keen to keep the ASC and the ADMM as open and transparent as

possible, particularly to reassure China that ASC activities are in no way aimed at (or predicated on a fear of) Beijing. Malaysia will likely continue to push for including ASEAN's dialogue partners in future ministerials. We also suspect that the Burmese may have been quietly encouraged not to attend by the Malaysians, still smarting from Foreign Minister Hamid's unsuccessful attempt to see Than Shwe and Aung San Suu Kyi during his recent visit to Burma (ref B).

LAFLEUR